

Autoworkers at Detroit public meeting: “Rank-and-file committees of the working class are the answer”

Our reporters
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A broad cross section of workers from throughout the Midwest and beyond attended the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*'s meeting in Detroit on Sunday afternoon to oppose the General Motors' planned plant closures and mass layoffs (see: “Detroit public meeting resolves to organize fight against General Motors plant closures”).

There were more than 80 people in attendance, including delegates from Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan, as well as Shannon Allen, an Amazon worker from Texas.

A dominant theme in the meeting was the need to organize the working class independently of the United Auto Workers and the trade unions. Workers spoke with contempt of the UAW and its role in forcing through concessions contracts and operating as an agent of corporate management. Many stressed the role of the WSWS in educating workers and organizing opposition.

WSWS reporters spoke with workers after the event.

Linda, a Ford worker at the Dearborn Stamping Plant who brought her daughter to the meeting, said, “I think a lot of people do want to fight against these conditions in the plant, they just don't know where to start. Plus, if we do start, where's our back-up going to come from? Because we're going against management and the people that are supposed to be protecting us [the unions], but they really aren't. They're working with management.

“We have to ask them permission to strike, but I feel like that should be our decision: to support whatever decision we want. Because they're going to think about their processes and their stock [in the auto companies] before anything else.”

Linda spoke in support of the formation of rank-and-

file workplace committees, run by and for workers themselves and independent of the UAW. “I believe if we come together, and help grow it, it could really work,” she said. “Because people are so tired of all this. And the older workers, the older generations, they've been giving concession after concession, and they're feeling beat down too. They've been lied to and played. There's been no fight to stop these things. They want to end the two-tier system. Right now nobody is standing up fighting for it because everybody is scared of losing their job, becoming a target.”

Angela, an Indiana autoworker, said, “I am confident that the UAW no longer represents the working class. They are just a big business, just like Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford. They've stolen from us, and then they vote themselves pay raises. I think it's outrageous.”

“I think the WSWS is getting the information out,” she added. “I think that rank-and-file committees of the working class are the answer. I am confident that immigrants and Mexico aren't the problem. I am confident that capitalism, greed, and the class struggle are the problem. I think the answer is here.”

Angela said she supported the resolution, adopted unanimously at the meeting, which called for “rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, Unifor and other unions, in all the affected workplaces and neighborhoods, to organize opposition to the plant closures.”

“I think that the resolution is fantastic,” she said. “We need to move forward on it, not just talk about it. I think this will take organizing rank-and-file committees and get people to understand that we are the same class.”

MJ, a Fiat Chrysler autoworker at Michigan's

Jefferson North Assembly Plant, said an appeal must be made directly to two-tier autoworkers for a united struggle. “I think that if we were to call a meeting for the two-tier workers, we could pack the house,” she said. “They need to know that we were here ... Workers really want to fight. They really want to know that there is a fight in a diverse crowd. They need to feel like if they do step out, they have somewhere to go.”

MJ opposed the efforts to pit the younger autoworkers against the older. “The younger generation is very smart and strong and aggressive,” he said. “They will speak up when there is corruption or about the way they feel about the union’s lack of help, especially the ones that are not being paid their fair wages and don’t have a pension. There are a lot of fires out there, but they don’t know how to move beyond the union.

“We just need to develop this in January, this movement needs to be so hyped up to where it really gets embedded into the workers who are frustrated. They are looking for a way to fight and a way to take it to the streets.”

Debra, a Chrysler worker with eight years, who previously worked at General Motors for a year, found out about the meeting from her Facebook news feed a week ago. “I just decided to come,” she said. “I am really doing some soul searching. I was raised in a UAW family. I don’t want to say I’m done with them. I’m trying to find out what direction to go in. I want things to be fixed.”

She said the GM layoffs were “unnecessary” and that “the company is making record profits. We have plenty of workers who produce a lot of money, so where is it all going?”

“I think the resolution is good,” she said. “When [Amazon worker] Shannon [Allen] spoke, it hit home for me. My daughter works for Amazon as a second job. The only way change can happen is to speak out.”

Debra said she was impressed by the slide displayed by WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White during his opening report, which showed the more than \$1 billion in assets of the UAW. “I think it’s absolutely terrible what the UAW has,” she said. “It’s really sad. We’re the workers who are out on the floor. We’re sacrificing our bodies, we’re doing all the work. It’s a slap in the face.”

She said it was important that the resolution called to

unite with workers in Mexico and internationally, and that the UAW’s attacks on Mexican workers was “the old divide-and-conquer trick. I think we need to unite internationally. Years ago, it used to be just ‘the US,’ but now we’re in a global society. Where we are now is a click away from another country.”

Theresa, a worker and resident of Flint, Michigan, who has been involved in the fight against the city’s lead water poisoning, said, “As far as what’s facing the working class, I came because we are facing in some ways a similar situation. We’re both being attacked and ignored. For us up in Flint, they poisoned us and then just tried to ignore us. But it is impossible to ignore. It’s happening everywhere, people are having their water poisoned or something similar in so many other places. But if the working class, from all walks of life, stick together, it’s going to be real powerful, it really is. We should all stick together.”

She reflected on what was presented at the meeting. “The call for a rank-and-file committee is really new to me. Tonight is the first time I’ve even thought about it. Someone from the Socialist Equality Party invited me and I came. When I saw it though, I totally agree with it. ... I would be surprised if anyone in Flint wouldn’t support this. It’s what we need. In this country and internationally.”

Kathy, a retired social worker, also said she liked “the idea of rank-and-file committees that organize to fight for workers’ rights.” She said she was concerned about factory shutdowns because “when people are laid off they stand to lose their houses and their cars. It affects the whole area. I didn’t realize that corporations are increasing their profits at the expense of the workers.”

She said workers should unite internationally in a common struggle. “The use of temporary workers that have few rights and benefits is deplorable. They should be hired as full-time workers with benefits. I think that linking workers across borders is good. They are always pitting workers against each other when in fact we need to unite.”



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